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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this review was to investigate the relationship between counselor characteristics and reports of effectiveness. The theoretical position appears to focus on two opposing views. The humanists emphasize the influence of intuition, genuineness, and spontaneity, while the behaviorists place importance on technique, analysis of procedure, and research. This review grouped each study according to its criterion of effectiveness. Generally, the results were viewed as disappointing, often contradictory, and only tentative. Specifically, the findings indicated that the focus of research should shift from the personality of the counselor to particular behaviors, skills, or interactions. (Author)

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ARE EFFECTIVE COUNSELORS MADE OR BORN?

A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ARE EFFECTIVE COUNSELORS MADE OR BORN?

A CRITICAL REVIEW

Studies of counselor characteristics have occupied the attention of counselor educators since the field came of age in the 1950's. The assumption which has worked to maintain this interest over the years is that certain personality variables are associated with, or the cause of, the different degrees of counselor competence which seem to exist. In addition, many persons engaged in the training of counselors have experienced that some students appear to adapt more readily to the counseling role than others. Two decades ago Cottle (1953) reported the research on this topic to be wanting in terms of the subjectivity, circularity, and uncontrolled sources of data contamination and because the characteristics which were involved lack relevance theoretically. Recent studies, although somewhat more refined, continue unabated with little concern shown that few emerging consistencies seem to accrue.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to examine the relationship between counselor characteristics and counseling effectiveness by reviewing the research reported since 1960, by commenting on various approaches, and by attempting to identify the conclusions which may reasonably be supported by the evidence which is available. A recurring problem in research on this topic has been the stumbling-block presented by the criteria chosen to measure effectiveness. Some studies are found in which a global judgment of "good" counseling is arrived at by undetermined means, while other determine effectiveness with the aid of rating scales,

checklists, or some device which tends to structure the process. Far less research has been conducted in which some measure of counseling outcome or performance has been related to significant personal variables of the counselor. Each of these approaches will be discussed in turn.

Effectiveness Determined by Global Judgment

Numerous studies have been performed utilizing unassisted, global ratings of effectiveness as the sole criterion measure (Kazienko & Neidt, 1962; Wicas & Mahan, 1966; Blocher, 1963; McDaniel, 1967; Gruberg, 1969; McClain, 1968; and Combs & Soper, 1963). It is felt that little comment is needed in regard to the utility of such an approach. The lack of clarity concerning the basis for determining "effectiveness" makes replication fruitless and has brought forth the characterization of such work as popular, though unproductive (Whiteley, 1969).

Effectiveness assessed by Scales and Other Devices

Other studies have attempted to avoid or minimize such deficiencies by involving one or both of the following strategies. Counseling competence may be rated on some limited dimension such as empathy or communication effectiveness (Passons & Olsen, 1969; Bergin & Solomon, 1963). The other tact, which is often taken concurrently, is the use of some formal rating device (i.e., Counselor Rating Blank, Communication Rating Scale, Counselor Evaluation Rating Scale, etc.) in order to specify, to some degree, what is being evaluated (Whiteley, et al., 1967; Russo, Kelz & Hudson, 1964; Milliken & Paterson, 1967; Brams, 1961; Freedman, Antenen & Lister, 1967; Donnan, Harlan & Thompson, 1969; Wittmer & Lister, 1971; Myrick, Kelly & Wittmer, 1972).

Several general points can be made about the studies listed in this category:

1. Most counselor characteristics investigated were not significantly related to the criterion employed.
2. Where a counselor characteristic was found to be significant once but was investigated more than once, contrary results were often shown.
3. Although actual steps were taken to formalize the criteria, a basic lack of confidence remains in regard to the relationship of the devices and measures employed and counselor effectiveness.

Effectiveness Assessed by Multiple Criteria

Numerous researchers have attempted to employ multiple criteria (Bernos, 1966; McGreevy, 1967; Jansen, Robb & Bonk, 1970; Graff, 1970; Eberlein & Park, 1971; Demos & Zuwaylif, 1966; Johnson, Shertzer, Linden & Stone, 1967). Little real gain appears to result in this move from the employment of one "non-objective or invalid" measure of counseling effectiveness to many. Most likely, the kinds of problems already referred to will remain, while other sources of concern come into focus. For instance, since the criteria often seem to measure rather independent elements, they should not properly be combined. However, if the criteria are treated separately, given the typical forms of analysis employed, the chance occurrence of significant findings will increase (uncontrolled alpha level). A particularly disturbing aspect of this approach is the suspicion that the results obtained are in part a function of the choice of criteria.

Effectiveness Assessed by External Criteria

In an effort to avoid the criteria problems encountered by the previous

studies, some researchers (Dispenzieri & Balinsky, 1963; Gonyea, 1963; Jackson & Thompson, 1971; Trotter, et al., 1971; Foulds, 1969 a, 1969 b, 1971; Rowe & Winborn, 1973; Winborn & Rowe, 1972) have made positive strides toward the use of a more objective criterion measure (i.e., Counseling Interviewing Test, percentage of cases closed as successful, objective evidence of client movement, relationship to Carkhuff rating scales).

In all of these studies, the sole significant results were obtained by Foulds (1969 a, 1969 b). He found that various subscales of the Personal Orientation Inventory were significantly correlated to Carkhuff ratings of empathy, genuineness, and a composite score. However, the results could not be replicated (Winborn & Rowe, 1972).

The studies cited above have an advantage in relating more objective measures of counseling effectiveness to personality dimensions of concern. However, the price which was exacted may be reflected in the lack of positive findings.

Discussion

Given the rather sizeable effort which has been invested in this area, the results may be viewed as generally disappointing, often contradictory, and only tentative. In addition to the dearth of positive leads, several dissonant statements have appeared. A multivariate analysis, for instance, by Moos and MacIntosh (1970) indicates that the tendency to be empathic does not appear to be the result of a "trait", but is more situationally determined. Knowles and Barr (1968), noting the emphasis on ideal subjective traits of counselors, have pointed to studies of effective people which demonstrate

the importance of objective traits and attitudes as well. Moreover, characteristics identified with successful college counselors were found to be those which related to interpersonal skills rather than essential attributes of the counselor as an individual (Schoenberg, 1971).

Perhaps this type of research persists because of the assumptions shared by many counseling theories. With most dynamic and experiential-humanistic approaches the locus of concern is upon the inferred, internal states and consequently unobservable characteristics of counselors and their clients rather than the external, observable behavior which individuals demonstrate in their environments. Theory ought to provide direction for research, but when continued investigation yields little in return, reassessment of assumptions and/or procedures should be in order.

It has been suggested that the pursuit of specific traits be abandoned in favor of investigations concerned with higher order variables (Sprinthall, Whiteley and Mosher, 1966; Doyle and Conklin, 1970). Although Allen (1967) has followed this tack with some success, this approach seems limited due to the vagueness of the analysis which results. A more satisfactory resolution would seem to be outlined by Mosher (1968) who has called for a change in emphasis from what the counselor <u>is</u> to what he can <u>perform</u>.

If necessary counseling skills can be identified, it would seem purposeless to attempt to locate characteristics which have less than a chance association with the behaviors of interest. The focus of research behavior should shift from the personality of the counselor to particular <u>behaviors</u>, skills, or interactions and their relation to counseling outcome. Hopefully, investigations of this kind will generate information of greater utility.

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